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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: PRESIDENT CHEN SHUI-BIAN'S MEETING WITH KMT
CHAIRMAN MA YING-JEOU

¶1. Summary: Taiwan dailies April 4 focused much of their coverage on the Monday meeting between President Chen Shui-bian and KMT Chairman Ma Ying-jeou. Nearly all Taiwan dailies ran a banner headline along the lines of: "President Chen Shui-bian said if China's President Hu Jintao announces that the '1992 consensus' is the principle of 'One China with Different Interpretations,' not the 'One China' principle, Chen will absolutely respect it."

¶2. In terms of editorials and commentaries, the pro-independence "Liberty Times" editorialized that the way to avoid military conflict across the Taiwan Strait is to follow Taiwan's mainstream public opinion. The centrist, pro-status quo "China Times" suggested in its editorial that President Chen try to understand what the Taiwan people want and to refrain from doing anything that contradicts their wishes. The pro-unification "United Daily News" said in its editorial that although the proposal for Taiwan independence illustrates the dilemma facing the island, the proposal per se cannot become an option. The pro-independence, English-language, "Taipei Times" said in its editorial that while it is good for President Chen and Chairman Ma to engage in a discussion, neither Chen nor Ma can do anything if China does not soften its attitude toward Taiwan. End summary.

A) "Follow Mainstream Public Opinion In Order to Move Closer to Good Fortune and to Move Away from Disaster"

The pro-independence, "Liberty Times" [circulation: 600,000] said in an editorial (4/4):

"... In the international community, China holds the patent for the '1992 Consensus,' and there are no political parties in Taiwan that can ignore this fact. To use the ambiguous '1992 Consensus' as a way to resume cross-Strait negotiations means to allow China to put 'The One China Principle' into the '1992 Consensus.' Consequently, Taiwan will become a loser no matter [what happens] in any future negotiations. It is like wrapping China's attempt to invade Taiwan in a peaceful [looking] guise.

"[KMT Chairman Ma Ying-jeou's] proposal supports the status quo, but does not seek immediate unification or independence [and] seems reasonable, but it is actually implausible. What is Taiwan's status quo? Mainstream public opinion has showed very clearly that Taiwan is a sovereign and independent democracy.

"If leaders of the ruling party and opposition parties could set an example and cooperate with each other, it would be easy to seek consensus on the basis of mainstream public opinion. This is the way that will move closer to good fortune and move away from disaster."

B) "A Dialogue with Interaction, But Without Consensus"

The centrist, pro-status quo "China Times" [circulation: 400,000] said in its editorial (4/4):

"Ma Ying-jeou said he hoped that President [Chen Shui-bian] could re-adopt the 'Five No's' and Ma tried to persuade him by using the example of the rapid rise in Chen's approval rating in 2000. After Chen stated the 'Five No's' in his 2000 inauguration speech, Chen's approval rating rapidly rose to 80 percent, in a sharp contrast to the 39 percent of the total votes he received in the presidential election in 2000. Ma even said the opposition parties would definitely do their best to support Chen [if Chen were to re-adopt the 'Five No's']. President Chen, however, did not respond at all. On the contrary, Chen tried to defend his controversies. For example, Chen pointed out that [despite opposition from the United States,] he nonetheless pushed for the 'referendum' in order to strengthen Taiwan's democracy, even at the cost of being excoriated by U.S. President [George W. Bush] and consequently having a 10 percent drop in his approval rating. ...

"The process that ceased the functioning of the National Unification Council was [noisy and tumultuous], and it even surprised the international community. What was the consequence? There was no rise in the [Taiwan] president's approval rating. The approval rating for the ruling party even has reached a new nadir. ... The fact that the approval ratings for the president and the ruling party are low shows that what the president and the ruling party do are contrary to the desires of the Taiwan people. ..."

"... For President Chen, we suggest with utmost sincerity that he come down from the 'clouds of power' and really try to understand the needs of the ordinary people. ..."

C) "Constitutionally One Taiwan" or "Constitutionally One China"?

The pro-unification "United Daily News" [circulation: 400,000] editorialized (4/4):

"The reality is that the R.O.C. has been facing a huge dilemma over the past 50 years; experiences over more than the past ten years have proved that there is no possibility to bring the Taiwan independence issue to the negotiation table. Ma Ying-jeou has tried to solve the R.O.C. dilemma under the R.O.C. constitutional framework; Chen Shui-bian, however, has highlighted the R.O.C. dilemma. But Chen does not have a chance to bring the solution that aims at pushing for Taiwan independence to the negotiation table. This is the dilemma that Taiwan faces: the proposal for Taiwan independence points out the R.O.C. dilemma, but Taiwan independence per se cannot become an option. ..."

D) "Chen-Ma Talks a Positive Start"

The pro-independence, English-language, "Taipei Times" [circulation: 30,000] opined in an editorial (4/4):

"Chen and Ma continued to differ on the term and meaning of the so-called '1992 consensus,' Chen said that he could not find any official documentation to support its existence, adding that it was a fabrication made up by former Mainland Affairs Council Chairman Su Chi in 2000. Regardless of how the ruling or opposition party views it, the question is what Beijing thinks. China believes that 'One China' refers to the People's Republic of China (PRC), and there is little room for either side to have its own interpretation. Chen urged Chinese President Hu Jintao to clarify whether Beijing would agree to each side of the Strait interpreting the 'One China' policy differently, adding that he would respect the result.

"Although the pan-Blue and pan-Green camps may hold opposing views on cross-Strait policy, their differences are no greater than the disparity between Taiwan and China. Chen has now put the ball in China's court. IF China fails to adopt a flexible approach, neither Ma's interim agreement nor Chen's proposal to establish a peaceful, stable framework for interaction between the two sides will mean anything. ..."

